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—Rhonda Clements, *Manhattanville University, Purchase, NY*

**Playing Place: Board Games, Popular Culture, Space**

Chad Randl and D. Medina Lasansky, eds.  
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023.

Introductions, acknowledgments, figure credits, notes, selected bibliography, contributor biographies, and index.

272 pp. \$39.95 cloth.

ISBN: 9780262047838

For many of us, our interest in games started from losing ourselves in a sense of immersion and immediacy. Games pull us into other worlds, other times, and other bodies. The spirit of play takes hold of us, and new, altered perceptions of space and time become so natural as to be unremarkable. Randl and Lasansky's *Playing Place* contains a multitude of considerations about the construction of space and place in games. How do board games construct spatial interactions, and what can these constructions tell us about players and cultures? While the editors approach the question from an architectural perspective, the sizeable number of authors in this collection draw from several dissimilar backgrounds. By the editors' own admission, this choice is an intentional push to extend answers as widely as possible. This choice is the greatest strength in the collection, and it points to the rich interdisciplinary potential of game studies. Rather than an authoritative voice on spatial construction in board games, this

approach allows many generative avenues of discussion and radically broadens the appeal of the collection as a whole. Whether examining the cultural history of the South Bronx neighborhood as represented in a board game or the ludic logic of real-world spaces in real-world cities, *Playing Place* holds great value, especially for readers intrigued by the intersection of material and ideological components of games.

Because of the wide array and sheer quantity of essays in this collection (thirty-eight in total), each essay is modest and approachable. Essays focus on ludic, visual, and tactile approaches to a game or games united by a theme. Rarely does an individual essay stretch beyond a few pages, and each is replete with beautifully rendered pictures and figures. Each page is a joy to turn and behold, inviting readers to revisit favorite chapters and ideas. However, readers should not mistake the succinctness of chapters as a dearth of thought and depth. Indeed, the contributors to this collection strike a uniform balance between welcoming, bite-sized narratives and a well-informed, powerful thesis. This stylistic choice makes *Playing Place* welcome not just for young academics or professionals but also for more seasoned board game analysts who are interested in finding sound perspectives on games both old and new.

Framing these essays is a transparent and helpful introduction and conclusion, written by Randl and Lasansky. The editors recognize that anthologies such as theirs are read "by skipping between subjects of greatest curiosity" (p. xvi). Besides just signposting their clear intentions and hopes for the collection,

Randl and Lasansky's introduction gives requisite theoretical grounding. Sections of the introduction often engage a scholarly quote or idea before explaining how particular essays in the collection build on, challenge, or complicate it. As a result, I often flipped back and forth from the introduction to individual essays. This sort of reading can be quite enjoyable, but students may need more guidance in connecting the ideas from the introduction and conclusion to the connecting chapters.

The chapters of *Playing Place* are divided into eight sections. Although the essays in *Playing Place* are uniformly strong, I found the most compelling sections to be those that engaged the propagandistic or idealistic constructions of imperial and communal spaces, titled "Conquest and Control" and "Identity, Community, Disparity," respectively. For example, Diana Garvin's "Imperial Board Games for Future Colonists" offers a fascinating glimpse into the rhetoric of 1937's *La Conquista dell'Abissinia* (The Conquest of Abyssinia). *Conquista* gamifies the Italian invasion of eastern Africa in the mid-1930s. Garvin connects game events to historical events, arguing that playing

*Conquista* well required "learning how to move through colonial spaces" (p. 113). Garvin, as well as many other contributors in *Playing Space*, persistently pushes the powerful through line that board games have been lived artifacts, enmeshed in history and culture, for millennia.

One of the greatest qualities of strong writing is its ability to evoke our own curiosity and spark new ideas. In this regard, *Playing Place* does not disappoint. For academics, psychologists, architects, and educators, this collection reminds us that design and ideology are intertwined, producing tangible outcomes for players, patients, consumers, students, and others. Because of the editors' flexible approach to content and methodology, there is sure to be an essay (or seven) that inspires readers to question the playful spaces around them. Since reading this collection, I have found myself subconsciously inspecting the physical components of my tabletop games, staring intently at a map, or repeatedly stroking a game piece. I expect I will not be the only one.

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—Mark Hines, *University of Kentucky, Lexington*